

Dileep Prakash's riveting portraits of Anglo-Indians tell moving stories of a community disappearing slowly

Fading quietly into the sunset

by Piya Kochhar

DILEEP Prakash's *The Anglo Indians* is a photography book where pictures tell a thousand stories - stories about a fading part of our history. Two years back, Prakash, a photojournalist based in Delhi, embarked on an odyssey across India taking portraits of the Anglo-Indian community, which has dipped from 300,000 before Independence to about 90,000 today. And the decline shows no signs of stopping.

"Some people migrated to England, others passed away, and the new generation is assimilating into the mainstream," says Prakash, whose wife June is also an Anglo-Indian. "This country is homogenising. Everyone dresses the same, dyes the hair blond in the same way, and the Anglo-Indian community, too, is losing its identity. Fifty years from now, no one will know who's an Anglo-Indian."

Prakash seems to have a fascination for the disappearing part of our collective memory. Seven years back, he did a project on the disappearing steam engines. Most of the men who piloted these locomotives used to be Anglo-Indians.

An Anglo-Indian, according to the definition provided by Article 366(2) of the Constitution, is a child born of an Indian mother and a European father "domiciled within the territory of India." The community, which is 500 years old, had survived on the fringes of the ruling class for 450 years after Vasco da Gama discovered India. But, as Prakash points out, the entire community got sidelined after Independence.

While working on the project, Prakash met with 5,000 members of this community, taking thousands of portraits. "These are true collaborations. In many cases the subjects themselves decided how or where they wanted to be photographed," he says.

Prakash often stayed with the person whose pictures he was shooting. "This is a limited documentation of a community that is disappearing," he says. "Some of these people are the last of their kind." Indeed, one of them, Edith Garlah, passed away soon after being photographed, but not before completing a century.

You can view Dileep Prakash's photographs at Photolnk, 1, Fuz Road, from Monday, March 17



Edith Garlah looks out into the radiant light of the day in Mussoorie. "We had tea together and she had a gentle smile," Prakash remembers of the woman who ran Woodlands School, where the hill station's elite sent their children. She was 99 when this was taken. A year later, she died.



Derek Clarke of Kalimpong, lovingly called 'Ginger', takes a break from work at the Dr Graham's Homes bakery. Derek is touching 80. The Homes were founded by the Rev. John Anderson Graham, a Church of Scotland missionary, in 1900, out of concern for the neglected Anglo-Indian children. Derek is the master baker, and he dishes out delicious breads and pastries.

DILEEP PRAKASH/PHOTOINK



Stella and Trevor Hale, photographed outside their home in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. They had just lost their son in a car accident. "At our first meeting, I simply sat and listened as he talked about his son, God, life and death," says Prakash.

Reginald Jennings, who'd served in the Indian Army from 1943 to 1971, poses with his sisters Rene Santos (left) and Vera Jennings at their 200-year-old ancestral bungalow in Lonavala, Pune. They have been living there since 1930. "I think we all look quite alive. I am 95, Vera is 93, and Rene is 92 ... we're all still tooting around," he told *Mail Today*. "We are the only ones of our kind left in India ... all my relatives have run away from here!"



Christine Fernandes calls her home Ferneler's Estate. Tucked away in Khurda Road, Orissa, it has no electricity and the windows are broken because she doesn't have the money for repairs. When Prakash asked if he could take her photo, she asked him politely to take an appointment. She consulted her small pocket diary and requested that he come the next day. She put on her best dress and pearl necklace for the shoot.

